



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

December 5, 2014

Dear Colleague:

This letter alerts all social and behavioral science researchers to the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) interest in receiving proposals related to policing and crime that can strengthen our knowledge base and enhance criminal justice practices. NIJ has been building its policing research portfolio for many years and will continue to do so in its pursuit of improving the administration of justice in this country.

NIJ's policing research portfolio runs the gamut from police organization and management to the effectiveness of crime prevention and control strategies to police accountability. In the early years, NIJ's research focused on evaluating standard policing strategies, such as response time, problem-oriented policing and police response to domestic violence. As community policing gained traction as a critical strategy for policing, NIJ shifted its focus to questions of the success of community policing programs and implementation strategies in police departments.

Recently, NIJ's police portfolio has focused on issues such as building researcher-practitioner relationships, police organization and management, impact of the use of technology on police practices (e.g., license plate recognition, CCTV and less lethal technologies), hot spot policing, police integrity, use of conducted energy devices, health and safety, use of force, reducing false convictions, early intervention systems, police legitimacy, and use of evidence-based knowledge.

As new research topics arise, many original topics remain of significant interest to NIJ and the field. In its efforts to prevent and reduce crime and violence, NIJ's Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) strives to address the questions raised by police practitioners and academics and to stay abreast of the latest developments in policing practices. ORE's particular interests in policing research for FY 2015 include topics such as:

- **Research on police use of force.** Officers are often required to enforce social order through the legitimate use of force. However, the use of force to compel citizens to comply with the law can often appear to be unnecessary, unwarranted or excessive. Strategies, tactics and technologies are needed to enable law enforcement personnel to make informed decisions regarding the appropriate use of force. Additionally, de-escalation strategies can assist police officers in managing threatening situations and reduce potential injuries to officers, suspects and innocent bystanders. Finally, police use of force, even when it complies with current statutes, regulations and case law, may impact police legitimacy in ways that are yet to be understood.
- **Research on officer safety and wellness.** Police officers face numerous challenges that can have serious implications for their safety and well-being. Over the past decade,

officer-involved shootings and vehicle crashes account for the largest number of line-of-duty deaths. Excessive fatigue and inadequate sleep may also significantly impair officer safety, health and performance. Finally, the nature of police work has been linked to other important officer wellness issues such as heightened levels of anxiety or depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide.

- **Evaluations of body-worn cameras.** An increasing number of police agencies in the U.S. have begun to consider the adoption and implementation of body-worn cameras to improve police practices and the delivery of policing services. The perceived benefits of this technology include increases in police accountability and transparency, reductions in citizen complaints of police misbehavior, decreases in incidents involving police use of force, and improvements in police-community relationships. However, potential concerns must be considered along with the perceived benefits, including the privacy rights of citizens and officers, data storage costs, policy and procedural issues governing the activation of body-worn cameras during police-citizen encounters, training, and the overall costs involved in the adoption of the technology.
- **Evaluations of internal and external procedural justice training mechanisms.** One of the biggest challenges to public trust and confidence in the police involves police integrity. Because of the highly discretionary nature of policing, managers have been confronted with incidents of abuse of authority (e.g., corruption, excessive use of force, other misconduct) by police officers. Incidents of abuse of authority or other crime-control strategies have the potential to erode public trust and confidence in the police and could reduce citizen compliance with the law. Despite considerable improvements in police-community relations over the last several decades, trust and confidence in the police continue to be a serious issue in many minority communities.
- **Randomized controlled trials of police patrol practices.** Although random patrols continue to be widely used in policing, past research has questioned its deterrent and crime-control utility. A number of studies have suggested that deploying marked patrol cars to high-crime hot spots could be a more effective crime-fighting strategy. Other studies that examined random patrol strategies have been criticized for failing to analyze other types of comparative patrol practices to capture the impact of police patrols on crime reduction or prevention.
- **Research on police investigations.** Over the last 40 years, numerous developments have affected the criminal investigative process. Despite these developments and the importance that the investigative process plays in the criminal justice system, little research has been conducted in the past decade about criminal investigations. Past studies on the investigative process have questioned the contribution of detectives to uncovering new evidence in solving crimes and have noted that in many ways, the investigative process has not changed much over the last 40 years. Moreover, other changes in policing can be viewed as influencing the investigative process.
- **Research on eyewitness identification procedures.** Over the last 30 years, more social science research has focused on identifying law enforcement practices that can undermine the reliability and accuracy of eyewitness identifications. As state and local law enforcement agencies adopt policies and procedures governing the use of

simultaneous or sequential eyewitness lineups, important questions have emerged regarding their utility. Are simultaneous or sequential photo arrays or lineups more effective in reducing the error rate among eyewitnesses? Are blind or “blinded” simultaneous photo arrays or lineups preferable to blind or “blinded” sequential photo arrays or lineups? Additionally, analyses using Receiver Operating Characteristics have suggested that simultaneous procedures may be as effective as sequential procedures in eyewitness identification. Finally, researchers need to examine whether videotaping increases or reduces eyewitness cooperation in the identification process.

- **Research and evaluation on the impact of social media on policing.** As the use of social media becomes more prolific, it is becoming more likely that probative evidence related to an investigation is being stored on or transmitted through social media. Given the frequency of use and the likelihood that past communications would be stored, multiple tools have been developed for law enforcement and others to monitor social media traffic and retrieve past posts and other media. Little is known, however, about the efficacy of these tools and methods, both proprietary and open-source, in retrieving probative evidence that leads to case closures.

Other topics of research on policing are valuable as well. NIJ, like police organizations across the country, is interested in building sound, evidence-based knowledge of interventions and programs that work and can be tested in a variety of settings.

Search past awards for examples of related current and completed projects on NIJ.gov, keywords “past awards.”

Prospective applicants are highly encouraged to consult with relevant project officers prior to submitting a proposal. In the case of policing, Dr. Brett Chapman at Brett.Chapman@ojp.usdoj.gov and Mr. Eric Martin at Eric.D.Martin@ojp.usdoj.gov are the appropriate project officers.

This is not a special competition or a new program. Proposals in response to this Dear Colleague Letter must meet the requirements and deadlines of the solicitation for which they are submitted.

The appropriate vehicle for responding to topics covered in this letter will be NIJ’s “Research and Evaluation on Justice Systems” solicitation. To receive an e-mail when NIJ issues a solicitation, subscribe to NIJ.gov. You also can follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/OJPNIJ) and Facebook (facebook.com/OJPNIJ).

The “Research and Evaluation on Justice Systems” solicitation should be available on the NIJ website in early 2015.

Sincerely,



William J. Sabol, Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institute of Justice